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The recent earthquake that tragically struck Mexico has once again turned the world's attention to that strife-torn nation.

It is imperative, however, that the U.S. government turn its attention to Mexico for another reason. Actions and reactions are taking place in that country which will have direct and possibly severe consequences for our own nation.

Asked before a Senate select committee on foreign affairs what it felt would be the single-largest threat facing the United States in the coming years, the Central Intelligence Agency did not give the obvious answer.

It did not name the ever-present danger of a potential nuclear war. It did not name either the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China. It did not name Libya or, for that matter, any nation in the Mideast.

What it did name as a potential threat to the well-being of the United States was one of our best allies and neighbors: Mexico.

Surprised? Who would not be? Mexico and Canada are just about the last countries to enter one's mind when considering what nations constitute a threat to the United States.

The possible threat from Mexico would not be military, but rather a threat by the average Mexican citizen caused by the abject poverty that permeates the country.

Mexico is a nation of 72 million, and its population is growing so fast that it staggers the imagination. The poverty is something you would associate with a backward country in Africa, not with the world's fourth-largest oil producer.

How poor are the Mexican people? Twenty-five percent of all Mexicans go without meat. Fifty percent cannot afford milk. In Mexico City, a metropolis of 17 million, (making it the world's most populous city), half the city's work force is unemployed. Of those who work, half make less than \$50 a month. The air pollution is so horrendous that on many days visibility is reduced to less than two city blocks.

Even with all that going against it, Mexico City grows in population by 1,000 a day. The rural poor are so desperate for work that they will go anywhere to find it. Even Mexico City.

What alarms many is that the gap between the rich and poor is so wide

Mexico's unresolved problems

and so intense that it may lead to a revolution between the two social classes.

The potential threat to the United States that the CIA referred to manifests itself in a number of ways.

The obvious threat is a mass migration of tired and hungry Mexicans to the United States in search of employment and escape from the harsh reality of poverty.

It is somewhat of a *Catch-22* situation for the United States. As we crack down on illegal migration from Mexico, we fan the very fires we seek to extinguish.

While illegal migration is a vent for the steam building inside the Mexican borders, it remains a solution unacceptable to the government of the United States, for the obvious reasons.

A possibly greater threat to the United States lies in the axiom: "As goes Mexico, so goes Central America." We need a strong Mexican government to counteract the chaos in Central America.

The United States hopes that Mexican President Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado can use the country's vast oil supplies to offset an economy that is dropping out of sight.

The government of Mexico needs help. It needs help from its friend and neighbor, the United States. The more we assist Mexico in stabilizing its economy, the more we help ourselves.

One thing, though, is certain. Mexico is in trouble. Well-known Mexican writer Irma Salinas Rocha asks: "The poor are much poorer now than they were during the revolution of 1910. Is this progress?"

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